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ABSTRACT

Minority children need broad experiences basic to literacy development that narrowly conceived curricula cannot provide. Parent interactions and first school encounters can provide daily experiences with print, writing, and stories. The time the teacher takes to involve parents in programs for minority children, by explaining activities that can be carried out in the home or in the community, is worthwhile. Such activities include trips to the library, conversations while carrying out daily errands and tasks, and sharing of written correspondence. First school encounters should be positive and confidence-building and can build meaningful print concepts. Teachers can capitalize on knowledge the children bring to school by immersing them in meaningful print, using bulletin boards, realia with familiar logos and labels, a grocery center, and children's name and object labels posted around the classroom. The environment and teacher should encourage active exploration of print, and experience with writing can soon follow. Writing opportunities can include note and letter writing, recipe writing, word collecting, and later, more sophisticated writing, composing, editing, and proofreading activities. Story strategies for the classroom include daily oral readings from large-format books designed for sharing and from stories dictated by children, dramatic interpretations and improvisation, audiotapes, and use of concept and picture books for successful experiences with oral language and print. (MSE)

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THE MINORITY CHILD:

STRATEGIES FOR LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

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THE MINORITY CHILD: STRATEGIES FOR LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

One cannot dispute the fact that minority children such as Hispanics, Blacks and Native Americans are still not achieving well in our public schools. School systems usually attempt to solve this minority problem by a curriculum strong in "basics". This emphasis on "basics" in most cases means a narrowing of the curriculum, emphasizing reading, writing and mathematics (Eisner, 1981). These "basics" often include drill in isolation and an overun of testing.

Narrowly conceived curriculums, however, will not give minority children the broad types of experiences that they must have in the sciences, the arts and social studies to use print in a meaningful way. Success in writing and comprehending text material depends very much on broad experiences and vocabulary development in content areas such as science, arts and social studies (Singer, McNeil & Furse, 1984; Cunningham, 1982).

There is a growing body of studies on young children who learned to read much on their own (Durkin, 1966; Clark, 1976; Taylor, 1983) which provides us with the data on just what is "basic" to literacy development in young children. First, children must have (from birth if

possible) daily experiences with a wide variety of literature. Secondly, children must have a great number of opportunities to smell, touch, feel, taste, explore and discuss, in a variety of content areas. Any strategies that teachers use with children must encompass these two "basics". Strategies will be shared for parents and for first school encounters. Print, writing, and story strategies will be explained. Let's begin with strategies for parents.

Parental Strategies

Involving parents and extended family in programs for minority children is essential for reading success (Butler & Clay, 1982; Holdaway, 1979; Durkin, 1976). Parents must be helped to recognize and support children's ventures into print exploration. To a busy teacher, adding a parental involvement task to an already busy schedule may seem too much work but the results will be worth the effort.

Teachers should take time to explain activities that can be carried out at home or in the community with a minimum of time and with no added expense if possible. Because minority parents may feel not confident in helping their children, it may be wise to schedule several parents around coffee and cookies to discuss different activities and ways of doing these activities. The teacher may want

to demonstrate how to tell a story or how to ask questions about a T.V. program.

Here are some suggestions for activities for parents. Parents can read to their children, take them to a library and see that the children have books at home. If parents can't read, they can tell stories to their children or sing songs.

In a grocery market, parents can name vegetables, point out prices, have the children name things that they know. Walking or driving, parents can point out the names of street signs, street names, and restaurant names.

When parents prepare meals they can involve the children in the cooking process letting the children read recipes, mix the ingredients, name the ingredients and the cooking utensils. Children can learn much about measurement from cooking.

Parents should be encouraged to share any written notes or letters that they receive. Paper of some kind must be supplied by the parents so children can write, color, draw, or cut. If possible plastic letters can be given to the children to play with. Children can write notes or letters to family and sign their name. Parents can help select T.V. programs and watch some with the child discussing and reacting to the content afterward.

With parents supporting the children at home, teachers must sustain and help minority children reach out to print in an unafraid manner.

First School Encounters

First school encounters must be positive and confidence-building. Here are some strategies to build meaningful print concepts.

Print Strategies. Young children have been exposed to print in their environment, but teachers need to capitalize on this knowledge children bring to the classroom (Griffin, Spicola, Banks, Reyes, 1982; Sims, 1982). The school environment must immerse children with meaningful print. There should be bulletin boards with familiar logos such as Pizza Hut, McDonald's and Coca Cola. Concrete objects such as boxes, napkins, cups, cans, etc... (all with some type of print) should be in a center where children can handle and read to each other. Teachers can make "Logo Books" for children to read. A grocery store center would give young children a chance to write shopping lists.

Children's names should be printed and taped to their desks so that they can refer to them easily. There should also be a central place where all the children's names can be seen and read. There should be labels over supply

centers, equipment and materials. The daily lunch should be posted or dittoed so all children can read it each day. The weather as well as the date should be posted and read.

These print strategies will help children begin to understand that print is meaningful and even more important, help children feel that they can read many words in their environment. Once children begin to solve the complexities of print with confidence that print makes sense, they will approach literacy tasks in a less fearful manner.

In summary:

1. Encourage active exploration of print.

2. Give children many opportunities to see print--in songs, in notes, on carton labels, on message boards, on objects in the room, lunch menus, newspapers, T.V. Guides, tee shirts, etc...

3. Your classroom should be print saturated not print starved (Holdaway, 1979).

Writing Strategies. As children begin to notice print and read print in the classroom, it's time to let children experiment with writing. This may be a surprising idea to many teachers who will let children perhaps copy but never write until children have learned all their letters.

The best way for children to learn their letters is to let them write freely (Bissex, 1980). Children should be given time to write (many will copy or draw in the beginning) in a journal each day. Teachers probably should start by just letting children "invent" the letters and words, working independently or in cooperation with other children (Clay, 1979; Read, 1975). Some teachers may want to write small captions on children's art work and let children underwrite.

Setting up a mailbox in the classroom will motivate children to write notes to the teacher (these should be answered by the teacher) and to each other. Children should write notes and letters to a variety of people, not just to the teacher.

Writing their favorite recipes can be an engaging activity. Children's recipes can be typed and put in a recipe book for all to read. Teachers should write notes on student papers rather than signs or smiley faces. Sometimes a question could be asked that the child would need to read and respond to in writing.

Children can begin a collection of their favorite words. The teacher can begin the collection, then let the children write their own words.

As children struggle to spell words, they will be forced to use all their grapho-phonemic knowledge to

invent the symbols for the sounds that they hear (Read, 1975). This means teachers should not be overly concerned with whether the children's writing has correct spellings in the beginning. The more children are exposed to words and the more children write meaningful ideas, the more standard the spelling will become (Bissex, 1980; Schickedanz, Sullivan, 1984).

Once children begin composition, writing interviews with the teacher, conferences with classmates, a variety of editing and proofreading practices can begin. Only one or two pieces of writing probably each week should have this careful attention. Not all writing needs to be corrected. The child should be given the opportunity to choose the compositions he wants to put a great effort upon (Moffett, Wagner, 1983).

Basically, minority children must not be thought of as deficient, but as active learners who have encountered print and can make sense of it. Too often these children are given very regimented, structured tasks because they are thought of as deficient learners (Sims, 1982; Heath, 1983). The following are more strategies a teacher can use to build power and confidence in literature.

Story Strategies. Children must begin to be exposed to a wide variety of literature as soon as they enter school. There should be several oral readings of stories,

of poetry, and nursery rhymes each day, rather than just one (Holdaway, 1979; Martin, Brogan, 1972; & Applebee, 1970).

Children should be exposed to predictable books so that children can begin to predict the text for themselves (Rhodes, 1981). Holdaway (1979) suggests using "Big Books" so that children can have a shared-book experience. Large books allow several children easy access to the print so that as the teacher points to the words, they can all read together.

Stories dictated by the children should be typed and bound in some inexpensive way. This language experience strategy begins to help children see themselves as authors as well as readers.

Children's interpretations and understandings of story can also be encouraged by dramatics. The recreation of story episodes through creative dramatics, reader's theatre, improvisations can enhance comprehension in young children (Carlton, Moore, 1968).

Story time should have opportunity for discussion of ideas and characters before and after the story is read or told. These discussions should not just be literal recall but opportunities to predict, infer and react to the story themes and characters (Holdaway, 1979).

Children can have stories audio-taped so that they can listen to the stories over and over (Martin, Brogan, 1972). Two children can read to each other. Perhaps even the principal can come in and read a story once in a while.

In children's literature, there are many concept books such as Now I Know books by Troll Publishers which teach science concepts; there are song picture books such as Hush Little Baby (Aliki, 1974); Skip to My Lou (Quackenbush, 1975) or The Farmer in the Dell (Zuromskis, 1978); there are books dealing with nature such as Fish is Fish (Lionni, 1970), Jumping Bean (Miller, 1979), The Very Hungry Caterpillar (Carle, 1969); and books dealing with social ideas such as Pezzettino (Lionni, 1975), Rabbit Island (Steiner, 1978) and the many versions of the Little Red Hen. All these types of literary experiences are necessary to build the experiential background needed by young minority children (Cunningham, 1982; Eisner, 1981).

We've discussed just a few strategies that can be used with minority children. These children need many successful encounters with print, not failures. These children must be free from fear about making mistakes so that they can actively engage in making sense out of relationships between oral language and print. These children need to be encouraged and supported, not hurried or pressured,so that they can work out the system of how

print works (Clay, 1979; Holdaway, 1979). Isolated drill on word pronunciation, too much dependence upon completion of workbook pages for drill, overcorrection when reading aloud, red marks on their written papers, and spelling tests are all practices which make these children begin to fear reading and writing soon after school starts.

The "basics" for minority children must be experiences within the communicative arts enriched in the children's sense-making ventures of everyday life. These "basics" cannot be rushed or ignored for these children.

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